

My Final Walk on the Ice

by Liz Spaulding, Lake Rescue homeowner

It was a sunny February 2015 afternoon day. Temperatures hovered near 0 degrees. It had been very cold that January, with many days in the minus degrees. I felt comfortable that the ice would be frozen. I have walked on the ice many winters. Stella (our dog) and I went snow shoeing down our lawn to the lake. I felt prepared to walk on the lake. I took my cell phone, some spikes (I was using screwdrivers with eye-holes drilled in them to tie the line) tied with string that I hung around my neck. This would help me if I fell in. You are supposed to put the spike into the ice with each hand and pull yourself out of the lake onto the ice.

As I walked in front of Gutner's (795 E. Lake Rd), I was thinking about where the new stream was, because it had been moved by tropical storm Irene. The next thing I knew, I was in the lake looking up as my dog paddled around me. I could not stand. Stella was trying to pull herself out, so I boosted her out. That is when I panicked. I began to yell for help. Then, I realized that midweek, midday, that there were few to no people around. I was about 15 yards from shore. I reached for the spikes to pull me out, but they had gotten wrapped around my neck, so I had to take off my gloves to get to the spikes. I finally was able to try to use the spikes but there was so much snow on top of the ice that I could not get a purchase. I then tried breaking the ice to get to shore. This worked. I was finally able to touch bottom and push myself up. Stella was waiting for me. By this time, my snowshoes were not securely fastened making walking through the snow difficult. My hands, were not functioning well because they were so cold. I managed to get the snow shoes off but had to go back on the ice to be able to walk.

I walked back to my house about 200 yards. I got out of my clothes. My frozen hands made this very difficult. I was shaking and hyper-ventilating by this time. I called 911 and Chief Billings called the EMTs and kept me on the line, then he went to locate my husband. I think I did all that I could have done to have prevented this fall into the lake, except take a buddy with me. I did not even think of using the cell phone in my pocket. It did not have a waterproof case anyway, so it was dead.

My husband rescued my gloves from the ice later and noticed that where I had fallen in was near a stream and ice was only 2 inches thick with snow on it. There was a large air bubble where the stream flowed. Thank goodness the stream was not flowing at that point; I would have been under the ice.

All in all, I feel very lucky to have survived. It was a very scary experience. My fingertips had no feeling in them for about 3 months